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Inside or Outside the Whale: George Orwell's Art and Polemic

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Thesis

INSIDE OR OUTSIDE THE WHALE:
GEORGE ORWELL'S ART AND POLEMIC

Submitted by

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To Diane, Blake, Chad and Evan

Chapter I

"Introduction"

Modern people, inundated with the news of worldwide crises for much of the Twentieth Century, may choose to withdraw from reality, but at what cost? Likewise, artists who hope to bring purely "aesthetic" enjoyment to the world may ignore politics, sociology or history, but at their peril. If, as George Orwell writes, "prose literature is the product of the autonomous individual" then "the destruction of intellectual liberty cripples the journalist, the sociological writer, the historian, the novelist, the critic and the poet, in that order."[1] When liberty is destroyed by forces inside or outside the psyche, the voice of the artist will be buried and useless.

This plight of the individual in our machine-drive, alienated society is the subject of George Orwell's life's work and, seven years after 1984 has come and gone his politics, Democratic Socialism, seems to be sweeping the Eastern Bloc. Orwell is at his best when his curiosity as a passive observer is combined with his deep, social indignation and sympathy for the individual.[2] To reach this point, however, was not easy.

In his essay "Why I Write" (1946) he includes a poem he wrote at the end of 1935, when he had "still failed to reach a firm decision" whether to write "ornate or merely descriptive books" or to become a political writer. Excluding the last three stanzas, it reads:

A happy vicar I might have been
Two hundred years ago,
To preach upon eternal doom
And watch my walnuts grow

But born, alas, in an evil time,
I missed that pleasant haven,
For the hair has grown on my upper lip
And the clergy are all clean-shaven.

And later still the times were good,
We were so easy to please,
We rocked our troubled thoughts to sleep
On the bosoms of the trees.

All ignorant we dared to own
The joys we now dissemble;
The greenfinch on the apple bough
Could make my enemies tremble.

But girls' bellies and apricots,
Roach in a shaded stream,
Horses, ducks in flight at dawn,
All these are a dream.

It is forbidden to dream again;
We maim our joys or hide them;
Horses are made of chromium steel
And little fat men shall ride them.[3]

Watching walnuts grow and rocking one's troubled thoughts to sleep are passive activities relying on the senses and, as described by Orwell, relegated to the past. Maiming or hiding one's joys, on the other hand, require action and analytical judgement.

At the start of this thesis, it is helpful to understand that this active-passive duality is not new. It stretches back to the days of the early philosophers. The Greek **pathema** has the same root as our word "passive" and refers to a suffering, misfortune, passive condition, situation or state of mind. A **poeima** is the opposite of a **pathema** and is defined as a deed, doing, action or a poem.[4]

In Book I, Chapters 6 and 7 of his Physics, Aristotle tries to decide whether the basic principles of nature are two or three or some greater number and talks about whether matter is purely dialectical, capable of being reduced to opposites such as active and passive. Edmund Burke's elaboration on Aristotle, his actus-status terminology, roughly corresponds to poeima-pathema.

What is of interest for our purposes here is how Orwell's art is related to these two organizing principles. Aristotle, in his "Psychology" writes that mind is part of nature and has an original, passive "capacity of becoming" and also "a creative (poietikos) cause" that makes the general class of things in nature "actual."[5] (96). He refers to art as an example of a creative cause.

Burke elaborates on Aristotle. He subdivides art into two contrasting forms -- the dramatic and the lyrical. These forms are a "variant" of the actus-status pair, "since drama centers in an action, whereas the lyric aims to arrest some one mood or moment."6 Orwell expresses himself both lyrically and dramatically throughout his career and was torn between the two forms just as he was torn between the contemplative versus the active life.

In this thesis, we shall examine his works in chronological order and try to comprehend how, why and when the dramatic and lyrical become variants of these two fundamental organizing principles. We will see how his characterization reflects his dramatic and lyrical techniques, when he records his

observations from inside and outside the life of the ordinary man (with varying degrees of success).

Orwell is a good candidate for this study of the active-passive duality because his primary organizing principle is the active-passive duality. He varies his range of consciousness to accomodate this principle, and even writes about the principle itself. Because most of his characters are victims, separated from nature, Orwell challenges the very enabling foundation of the active-passive duality, Aristotle's belief that mind and nature are one. We will see what happens to his characters and to Orwell's politics as they try to become reunited to nature, or escape their predicament, but fail.

By taking a chronological approach it is possible to see an evolutionary process at work. Politics becomes more dominant as Orwell's work evolves, and his art changes to reflect this dominance. Because the "social criticism and the personal break are defined elements."[7] in his work he is a good candidate for this study. The form of the novels is determined by focusing on personal breakdowns first, and social criticism through them in the novels of the 1930's; or social criticism first, with the personal breakdown inside it in 1984.

Chapter II

"From Poverty to Meaninglessness"

George Orwell did not believe that one can evaluate a writer's motives without knowing something of his early development. "Before he ever begins to write he will have acquired an emotional attitude from which he will never completely escape...if he escapes from his early influences altogether, he will have killed his impulse to write."[8]

Taking this as gospel, it is important for us to look at Orwell's earliest formative period, recorded in "Such, Such Were the Joys" which was written 30 years after he left St. Cyprian's school of horrors. At the school he witnessed a conflict in society "between the tradition of nineteenth-century asceticism, and the actually existing luxury and snobbery of the pre-1914 age."[9] It was a dichotomy which led to activism in the form of hard work and disapproval of self-indulgence on the one hand, and on the other the "assumption not only that money and privilege are the things that matter, but that it is better to inherit them than to work for them,"[10] a non-active and passive attitude. He cherished creature comforts and tried to include himself among the ranks of the snobbish, as boys will, and yet he was "aware of the impossibility of any subjective conformity."[11]

He writes that his "inner self" pointed out the "difference between the moral obligation and the psychological

fact." In other words, the moralist in him knew he should be content to live without creature comforts, but he was attracted to them nonetheless because they are part of human psychological makeup. This attraction caused him a certain amount of guilt and anxiety and contributed to his "conviction that it was not possible" to be a success, which he said in "Such, Such" was "deep enough to influence my actions till far into adult life."[12]

These factors, combined with his acute awareness of those who sit back and have things happen to them versus those who must take an active stance stay with him throughout his career and lend an aura of pathos to his life and work when he feels "caught between what he wants and what the political system has to offer."[13] Orwell was not a rich man. He couldn't afford to sit back and let things happen to him, and yet he was courageous and didn't want to feel trapped and let circumstances dictate his life.

In Down and Out in Paris and London, a dramatic autobiographical novel in the form of a loose picaresque, and sometimes described as the forerunner of the modern nonfiction novel, he joins the poor as a way to transcend guilt and anxiety and analyze the subject of success in order to come to terms with it. In this book about his experiences in 1929, he chooses to mingle with the poor, just as he had earlier chosen to take on the role of oppressor in a difficult assignment for the Burmese police, described in his first novel published after Down and Out, entitled Burmese Days. His way to

transcend the living memories of St. Cyprian's is to take control of his life by exercising his freedom of choice -- an activist stance.

Orwell once told his friend Brenda Salkeld, when she asked him why he was living the life of a tramp, that he wanted to know "what it was like not to have anything." He is curious, in addition to his other motivations. Charlie, a youth with a good family background and education who had run away from home and lived on occasional subsidies, is a "curious" specimen[14]. Orwell also writes:

> It is altogether curious, your first contact with poverty. You have thought so much about poverty -- it is the thing you have feared all your life, the thing you knew would happen to you sooner or later; and it is all so utterly and prosaically different. You thought it would be quite simple...(D&O 17).

When Orwell uses this point of view to lecture the reader he speaks as an observer, from outside the whale. He talks about being outside as a rhetorical point of view in his 1933 letter to his friend Brenda Salkeld about Ulysses.

> Bloom is an exceptionally sensitive speciman of the man in the street, and I think the especial interest of this is that the cultivated man and the man in the street so rarely meet in modern English literature. The man in the street is usually described in fiction either by writers who are themselves intellectually men in the street, tho' they may have great gifts as novelists (e.g. Trollope), or by cultivated men who describe him from outside (e.g. Samuel Butler, Aldous Huxley). If you read the words of almost any writer of the intellectual type, you would never guess that he also is a being capable of getting drunk, picking girls up in the street, trying to swindle somebody out of half a crown, etc. I think the interest of Bloom is that he is an ordinary uncultivated man described from within by someone who can also stand outside him and see him from another angle (CEJL 127-28).

Joyce is Orwell's model, starting with Down and Out and continuing throughout his career. Orwell's curiosity as a passive observer enables him to see his characters from another angle. The artist is an observer outside the whale, and when he becomes indignant he goes inside the whale if he really wants to effect change. He joins the man in the street, becoming "one of them" so to speak because in practice, "it is impossible to observe anything without being in some relationship to it."[15] When Orwell establishes personal relationships in Down and and Out, he becomes more involved inside the whale.

Unfortunately, these personal relationships are not extensively developed. He becomes fairly close to a couple of characters, including Bozo, the sidewalk artist (screever) and tramp, to the extent that he can even get inside Bozo's head, going deeper inside the whale so to speak. The narrator starts off, and Bozo answers:

> "But isn't it very hard to take an interest in things -- things like stars -- living this life?"
>
> "Screeving, you mean? Not necessarily. It don't need turn you into a bloody rabbit -- that is, not if you set your mind to it."
>
> "It seems to have that effect on most people."
>
> "Of course. Look at Paddy -- a tea-swilling old moocher, only fit to scrounge for fag-ends. That's the way most of them go. I despise them. But you don't need to get like that. If you've got any education, it don't matter to you if you're on the road for the rest of your life."
>
> "Well, I've found just the contrary," I said. "It seems to me that when you take a man's money away he's fit for nothing from that moment."
>
> "No, not necessarily. If you set yourself to it, you can live the same life, rich or poor. You can still keep on with your books and your ideas. You just got to say to yourself, 'I'm a free man in here'" -- he tapped his forehead -- "and you're all right" (D&O 164-65).

This passage is significant for a number of reasons. It shows how politics motivates Orwell. His social indignation leads him to question Bozo in the first place. Orwell is interested in determining whether or not money is necessary for success and freedom, a theme which will become the principle topic of discussion in Keep the Aspidistra Flying. The conflict between the acceptance of failure (the lack of success) and the various ways used to reach for some kind of success, including happiness, runs throughout Orwell's books. Orwell alleviates his worries about the impossibility of success by redefining success, and Bozo is one example. The failure of poverty becomes a virtue as Bozo is able to maintain his psychological and philosophical integrity outside the limits of society. Mind and nature are still one in Down and Out. In spite of poverty, Bozo's mind is still whole. He has a capacity of becoming and an ability to make things in nature actual through his art.

Bozo is able to transcend, to get outside of time by going inside the whale of poverty and his own consciousness. "The great redeeming feature of poverty is that it annihilates the future," writes Orwell, and since the less you have the less you worry "it takes off a lot of anxiety" (D&O 20-21) -- which isn't to say that his characters aren't frustrated. Orwell stands strongly behind the individual and yet tries to create in his novels a mode in which his characters are frustrated. He knew that poverty is an ideal mode to encourage frustration.

When you're hungry you don't want to do anything but your human nature drives you to try. Orwell's characters consistently do not overcome their problems. Even Bozo lands in jail by the end of the book. Each of his books ends in some form of resignation, accomodation to the system, outright failure or death. "The system catches and drains the individual so that his own actions become ultimately meaningless."[16] When the political outside takes precedence over the individual inside, the protagonists are swallowed by the whale of social forces beyond their control.

Because poverty leads to suffering, the poor in Down and Out don't have to worry about guilt, however. They are too busy trying to get by. Without fear of the future (which is annihilated), guilt and anxiety become immaterial. Later in his career, in The Road to Wigan Pier, Orwell admits that his motive in submitting to explorations of down and out life was a desire to expiate his guilt at having been an agent in Burma. Orwell the protagonist, like Bozo, is in search of a transcendent experience. His description of the infernal plongeur's cellar shows him inside the whale, inside a different world, a subterranean motif which we shall see repeated throughout his works.

> (I came) into a narrow passage, deep underground, and so low that I had to stoop in places. It was stifling hot and very dark, with only dim yellow bulbs several yards apart. There seemed to be miles of dark labyrinthine passages -- actually, I suppose, a few hundred yards in all -- that reminded one queerly of the lower decks of a liner; there were the same heat and cramped space and warm reek of food, and a humming, whirring noise...It was too low for me

> to stand quite upright, and the temperature was perhaps 110 degrees Fahrenheit...Scullions, naked to the waist, were stoking the fires (WP 55-56).

In this lyrical passage, Orwell's tone is almost gleeful. He is attracted to the mindless life of the plongeur because he is able to live, albeit temporarily, in another culture, which is a kind of escape or transcendence. He is also attracted to the subterranean motif and the denizens thereof because of his real sympathy for those who are passive victims who cannot escape, like himself in his early years. He can escape his middle class world by becoming temporarily "trapped" or submersed in a lower class and different environment. The only possible escape for the plongeurs and for many others locked into poverty is into prison. His novels are studies of victimisation, and "even the successful characters in Orwell's novels are to be pitied."[17]

It is while working in Paris that he first realizes that there is a kind of harsh equality and joy in the rough brotherhood of the poor, but that it is useless to them without liberty. As the narrator, he goes outside the whale, emerges from his subterranean existence to breathe the air of liberty and transcend his experiences in a polemical essay at the end of the book. Herein he takes an activist perspective on the subject of tramps and what should be done to solve the problem they bring to society. The active-passive duality as a theme is weakened in Down and Out because Orwell separates himself from the world he has created and returns to his middle class life. He leaves the action and goes outside the whale

prematurely. As a result the conflict between fighting for what he knows is right, as shown in the end piece, and the desire to retreat into passive acceptance inside the whale with the plongeurs is not fully dramatized.

Our discussion of the active-passive duality in Orwell's work requires analysis next of two of the best of his essays: "A Hanging" (1931) and "Shooting an Elephant" (1936)[18] where he describes events based on personal experience, "and then builds up his themes strictly from an ethical point of view, eventually narrowing the whole analysis down to moral-political polemics,"[19] a fuller dramatization of Down and Out.

In the beginning of "A Hanging" the victim, a Burmese criminal, is passive by default. He is in jail and has no choice. Because we never learn the nature of his crime, and as a result cannot make an informed judgment about the justice of the hanging, the narrator gives us no choice other than to sympathize with the victim and impugn British justice. The narrator observes that the victim is a man like any other, who would "step aside to avoid a puddle on the path" even though he is on his way to the gallows and shouldn't care about getting his shoes wet" (SAE 15) The narrator as polemicist then steps aside, so to speak, to observe his own thoughts and engages our sympathy with the victim again when he says: "I saw the unspeakable wrongness of cutting a life short when it is in full tide" (SAE 15). Such brief opinions are integral parts of the story and are hardly noticeable as asides. They represent an active stance in the form of mental activity, and are credible because they are closely linked to the descriptions.

A couple of paragraphs later, as the criminal stands on the gallows with the noose around his neck, he takes an active stance in the only way open to him -- with words. Calling on his God, he says "Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!" in a "steady, rhythmical" way, "almost like the tolling of a bell," and his dog "answered the sound with a whine (SAE 16)." He may be a criminal, but his dog loves him so he can't be all bad! The prisoner asserts his individuality at the last moment in companionship with his dog and the reader is more sympathetic and filled with pathos. This time the narrator not only observes his own thoughts but those of others who are present. He writes:

> We looked at the lashed, hooded man on the drop, and listened to his cries -- each cry another second of life; the same thought was in all our minds: oh, kill him quickly, get it over, stop that abominable noise! Suddenly the superintendent made up his mind. Throwing up his head he made a swift motion with his stick. 'Chalo!' he shouted almost fiercely. There was a clanking noise, and then dead silence (SAE 16-17).

By reporting others' thoughts, just as he reported Bozo's, Orwell the narrator remains inside the whale. If it were only his own thoughts in a long diatribe, he would be outside the action as a commentator and the plot would run the risk of becoming disconnected from the story. "Shooting an Elephant" has been called "Orwell's first fully achieved piece of writing" for this reason and because it takes off from Orwell's experience destroying a maddened elephant and moves on to larger issues of imperialism and the corruption of human nature.[20]

As a character inside the whale he describes the "dirty work of Empire at close quarters," which "oppressed him with an intolerable sense of guilt" (SAE 4). Once again, guilt is a motivating force. Lack of liberty is another factor. He is frustrated because he is stuck between his "hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible. "With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny. With another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts" (SAE 4). He is forced to take a passive stance, but his mind is active.

> Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd - seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys...To come all that way, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing -- no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at (SAE 8).

Finally, instead of attacking a Buddhist priest, he reluctantly shoots the elephant to avoid looking like a fool. His mental pride is more important than this creature of nature. Mind takes precedence over nature. It is a Pyrrhic victory because the policeman would rather stay outside the action, do nothing and remain passive but he has lost his freedom of choice. In resolving the tension by killing the elephant, to which he feels kinship since they are both alone

and separated from their kinfolk, he kills a part of himself. In this sense, he is a victim.

Nevertheless, even though he is a victim, he takes an active stance not only by describing the majestic elephant's death as an outside observer but by scrutinizing his own motives and deducing their political and moral implications. The falling of the elephant symbolizes the future falling of the Empire and the revivification of the protagonist's guilt. He concludes with a half-hearted justification of his action in the form of a personal confession.

> The older men said I was right, the younger men said it was a damn shame to shoot an elephant for killing a coolie, because an elephant was worth more than any damn Coringee coolie. And afterwards I was very glad that the coolie had been killed; it put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant. I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool (11-12).

The protagonist is alone when he makes his decision, isolated, solipsistic, with the weight of the Empire on his shoulders, and cannot tell others the truth. Orwell's fusion of personal and public themes is realized here to a greater extent than in any of his previous works, including "A Hanging." Orwell had found a form for his polemic and powers of observation in these essays and he clearly wanted to incorporate it in a novel. He tries to do so in his next two books, Burmese Days, a true novel often described as his best work of fiction, and A Clergyman's Daughter, a loose picaresque. In both of these the direct observation and the fiction are unusually close, though close in different ways and varying degrees. They are concerned

with the standard topics we have identified so far: guilt, success, freedom of choice, time, solipsism, escapism, the active-passive duality. But most of all, they are concerned with mind and nature, and go beyond "Shooting an Elephant," where the elephant is a thing outside of the control of the protagonist.

The direct observation in Burmese Days is most powerful when it is concerned with nature because Flory takes his identity from nature. He (like Orwell) is interested in nature because, like most of us, he has a desire to escape to a passive, pastoral Eden and he can control his observation of nature. Flory is happy when he first comes to Burma and "the Burmese children played hopscotch with gonyin seeds and flew kites in the cool winds...Wild flowers sprang into bloom everywhere - honeysuckle in thick bushes, field roses smelling of peardrops, even violets in dark places of the forest" (BD 66).

Orwell alternates dramatic passages and lyrical descriptions to form a stark contrast. He is inside the whale one minute and outside the next. For example, Flory asks himself whether he will ever find a friend, or a wife, "that quite impossible she" (BD 72). Then he leans over the gate, and the narrator says that "the moon was vanishing behind the dark wall of the jungle, but the dogs were still howling. Then we go back to Flory as some lines from Gilbert came into his mind, a vulgar silly jingle but appropriate -- something about 'discoursing on your complicated state of mind'" (BD 72). In

the next chapter, we are outside the whale as the narrator relates some dialogue and tells about an an arrest. He then describes the sordid conditions in the local lock-up with its earth latrine "that stank to heaven" and an "Indian coolie, who was covered from head to foot with ringworm like a coat of mail," and "a stout Burmese woman, wife of a constable, kneeling outside the cage ladling rice and watery dahl into tin pannikins" (BD 75). Then we're back to Flory's mind and vision:

> Flory went outside and loitered down the compound, poking weeds into the ground with his stick. At that hour there were beautiful faint colours in everything -- tender green of leaves, pinkish-brown of earth and tree-trunks -- like aquarelle washes that would vanish in the later glare. Down on the maidan flights of small, low-flying brown doves chased one another to and fro, and bee-eaters, emerald green, curvetted like slow swallows. A file of sweepers, each with his load half hidden beneath his garment, were marching to some dreadful dumping-hole that existed on the edge of the jungle. Starveling wretches, with stick-like limbs and knees too feeble to be straightened, draped in earth-coloured rags, they were like a procession of shrouded skeletons walking (BD 75-76).

There is no transition from the bee-eaters to the sweepers. The entire description is in one paragraph. Flory escapes into nature but is abruptly brought back to reality in a smooth stream of consciousness which is Orwell's subtle way of making a lyrical passage into a polemical statement, jumping from mental passivity to a more active and opinionated state of mind. After this description, the tale resumes with a typical dramatic format.

Flory's wish to escape drove him to leave England, and he wanted to escape the rejection which usually accompanied his disfiguring birthmark, in order to become a "superior" white. Eventually, he realizes that he has been accepting a demeaning existence in Burma and his guilt and anxiety come to the surface. Unlike Bozo, however, he is too much the idealist to live completely outside the law. His attempts to do so, to live inside Burmese culture with its nascent nationalism and outside English imperialism and English customs while remaining an imperialist, brings on the central conflict in the novel. He tries to find a middle ground within his escapist metier -- to teach his would-be mate Elizabeth about Burmese culture and politics and the joys of nature and hunting. Nature is the middle ground he hopes for, but the ground shifts under his feet. The climax of the book centers on a hunting expedition where Elizabeth shoots a pigeon and then a bantam cock:

> She could hardly give it up, the feel of it so ravished her. She could have kissed it, hugged it to her breast...She was conscious of an extraordinary desire to fling her arms round Flory's neck and kiss him; and in some way it was the killing of the pigeon that made her feel this...A sudden stillness came on them both, a sense of something momentous that must happen. Flory reached across and took her other hand. It came yieldingly, willingly. For a moment they knelt with their hands clasped together. The sun blazed upon them and the warmth breathed out of their bodies; they seemed to be floating upon clouds of heat and joy. He took her by the upper arms to draw her towards him (BD 168)

Then he thinks of his birthmark and lets go of her arms. "He dared not do it. Not here, not in daylight! The snub it invited was too terrible" (BD 168). Flory is a victim of his

own anxiety and guilt and this passage comes to mind later on when Flory loses his grip on nature and becomes a victim of a different sort. After Elizabeth starts her affair with Verrall, "everything -- birds, trees, flowers, everything -- was deadly and meaningless because she was not here" (BD 215). He loses his underpinnings. Mind and nature are separated, and eventually Flory does take action, by killing himself to alleviate his guilt and anxiety and escape this mortal coil. One might say that he goes back inside the whale of death because he couldn't go inside the whale of the womb and life. Orwell "was not so romantic as to believe that nature itself could provide moral or aesthetic energy in a post-Darwinian world. Besides, man can destroy it, leaving only remnants."[21] In this case, Verral and Elizabeth destroy Flory's bond to nature, in effect destroying part of nature by breaking a natural and fecund link between mind and nature. Flory tries to renounce society, then tries to join society but discovers it is impossible for him to do so without becoming a victim and casualty.

In the person of Flory, the connection between society and private anxieties is clearer than in any of Orwell's previous work. Orwell's ambivalent private desire for a life of renunciation, or for a social life politically and sexually in touch with others becomes clearer in Burmese Days. His resolution of this ambivalence, however, is the destruction of Flory's mental, passive "capacity of becoming" and his active ability to actualize.

The emphasis in A Clergyman's Daughter, as in Burmese Days and "Shooting an Elephant" is on the private, remote, solitary, even alienated individual. The discrepancy between the inner world of the mind and spirit which is defined by nature and the external world of society and human relations is also a theme of A Clergyman's Daughter. Dorothy also goes Down and Out in poverty in the city and hop-picking in the country. Like Flory, she is attracted to nature, though not to such a great extent because she suppresses her attraction. Kneeling among "tangled swathes of vegetation" she pulls a "frond of the fennel against her face and breathed in the strong sweet scent."

> Its richness overwhelmed her, almost dizzied her for a moment. She drank it in, filling her lungs with it. Lovely, lovely scent -- scent of summer days, scent of childhood joys, scent of spice-drenched islands in the warm foam of oriental seas! Her heart swelled with sudden joy. It was that mystical joy in the beauty of the earth and the very nature of things that she recognised, perhaps mistakenly, as the love of God ...it seemed to her that she could momentarily hear the mighty anthem of praise that the earth and all created things send up everlastingly to their maker. All vegetation, leaves, flowers, grass, shining, vibrating, crying out in their joy... All the riches of summer, the warmth of the earth, the song of birds, the fume of cows, the droning of countless bees, mingling and ascending like the smoke of ever-burning altars... She began to pray... forgetting herself in the joy of her worship. Then, less than a minute later, she discovered that she was kissing the frond of the fennel that was still against her face...She checked herself instantly, and drew back (ACD 65).

Dorothy goes beyond Flory's belief in nature in one way however, because she recognizes her pantheistic and mystical tendencies for what they are, and deliberately separates herself from nature. She admonishes herself for nature-worship

and, strict moralist that she is, pricks her arm three times with a thorn of the wild rose. Suppression of self-indulgence is her way to maintain her individual integrity and her faith.

She climbs out of the whale of nature into the harsh light of day, to continue to accept her drudgery, until (perhaps because of inadvertent glue sniffing), she passes out and finds herself outside the womb of the church and on the street struggling to survive, with no inkling how she was transported -- nor does the reader ever find out. She believes she is a victim of amnesia. This is an abrupt and artificial device on Orwell's part, which, if he'd thought about it could have been handled differently, perhaps in terms of the mind-nature issue. Because she cuts herself off from nature, he could have shown how her mind loses its strength and she becomes an amnesiac.

When the struggle is over, and her naturalistic experiences hop picking help to heal her amnesia and she can return home, she tries to reconstruct her philosophy of life. In her conversation with Warburton, she starts to tell him about her experiences down and out, but decides to launch into a polemical rationalization to herself instead. She tells herself: "Such things as these" (sleeping in the streets, getting arrested for begging and spending a night in the police cells, enduring Mrs. Creevy's nagging) "are disagreeable, but they do not matter. The truism that all real happenings are in the mind struck her more forcibly than ever before" (ACD 293-294). She tries to backpaddle and tells Warburton that "Even when you're practically starving -- it doesn't change anything inside you" (ACD 294), but she knows she has changed.

Orwell is becoming more interested in the subject of psychological functioning under stress and change. For Orwell, this is still a matter of the inside versus the outside. Warburton speaks and she responds:

> "Doesn't it? I'll take your word for it. I should be very sorry to try."
> "Oh, well, it's beastly while it's happening, of course; but it doesn't make any real difference; it's the things that happen inside you that matter."
> "Meaning?" said Mr. Warburton.
> "Oh -- things change in your mind. And then the whole world changes, because you look at it differently" (ACD 294)

Orwell realizes that this process of change is somehow connected to nature, but he does not specify exactly how. Dorothy is conscious of her loss, as she looks out the train window and observes the passing scene flourishing in spring, but she can find "no God to thank, and nothing -- not a flower or a stone or a blade of grass -- nothing in the universe would ever be the same again" (ACD 294-295). Poverty and her disillusioning experiences with Mrs. Creevy -- both outside influences -- have somehow made permanent her divorce from nature and mind, seemingly because she has lost her innocence. The actual moment of final divorce is not clear and is not important according to Dorothy. After Warburton suggests that her loss of memory was "only a device, unconsciously used, to escape from an impossible situation" she notes that it doesn't make any difference when she lost her faith -- before or after her attack of amnesia (ACD 296).

In the remainder of the book, Dorothy searches for a replacement for her faith. In a subsequent conversation with Warburton, she rejects as "just hedonism" his suggestion to just relax and enjoy life and "have a bit of fun while the going's good" (ACD 308). When he probes further, however, she cannot go beyond that response. The narrator has to step in to read her mind and put thoughts which aren't there into her head, which is rather an intrusion:

> What she would have said was that though her faith had left her, she had not changed, could not change, did not want to change, the spiritual background of her mind; that her cosmos, though now it seemed to her empty and meaningless, was still in a sense the Christian cosmos; that the Christian way of life was still the way that must come naturally to her (ACD 308)

She cannot recover her state of mind, so she will have to be satisfied with a way of life somehow tied into "the spiritual background of her mind," whatever that means. The narrator seems to be referring to memory and the past. For Dorothy, passive existence inside her church cocoon and resumption of her past life is a lesser evil than outside life in poverty on the road or as a schoolteacher without freedom to teach anything meaningful and fun. She recognizes her past as a vital part of her existence, a thing to hang onto, even if rather pathetically, when all else fails.

Active sexuality and hedonism is not a solution for Dorothy as it would have been for Flory. Dorothy has no money and little power of her own which may or may not be why her sexual instincts have been undeveloped, to the point where she

is positively repelled by men. In fact, she is a fanatical anti-hedonist. She won't allow herself to enjoy anything. On the other hand, Warburton is a hedonist. He "has intelligence without morality...and not only proclaims the world meaningless but is very happy to find it so."[22] He accepts the meaninglessness at the heart of things, and is the only truly happy character in all of Orwell's works! Dorothy also finds the world meaningless but chooses the status quo, to "remain in the middle, between a rejection made impossible by intelligence and an acceptance made impossible by morality."[23]

> There was, she saw clearly, no possible substitute for faith; no pagan acceptance of life as sufficient to itself, no pantheistic cheer-up stuff, no pseudo-religion of 'progress' with visions of glittering Utopias and ant-heaps of steel and concrete. It is all or nothing. Either life on earth is a preparation for something greater and more lasting, or it is meaningless, dark and dreadful (ACD 316).

It is either a preparation or meaningless, she cannot decide. Orwell was not happy with A Clergyman's Daughter and rejected it as his worst book, perhaps because both Dorothy and Warburton are apolitical. Meaninglessness does not make a political philosophy. It is a mental state and Orwell has not yet figured out how to connect mental states to politics. Orwell has not fixed on the political hope of socialism which will drive his work, but the problem of meaninglessness at least gives him something to joust against. The virtue of the book actually lies in its inconclusiveness, in its very inadequacy, the "nakedness" with which are exposed "unresolved

fears, unacknowledged longings, problems left standing and no more than half-understood."[24] In all of Orwell's fiction, including Down and Out to a certain extent, frustration with meaninglessness leads to attempted escape and eventual acceptance of failure.

To summarize what we have covered so far, in Down and Out Orwell the protagonist and narrator willingly experiences the frustration of poverty and willingly returns to the writing life. Bozo the screever finds a kind of independence through his own mental acuity. Flory escapes to Burma because he is frustrated by British Colonialism. When he loses the last vestiges of his pride and fails in love, he becomes very frustrated and feels he has no choice but to end it all. He cannot reestablish his mental links to nature after human nature fails him. The narrator/protagonist in "Shooting an Elephant" is also frustrated because he feels he has lost his freedom of choice. He shoots the elephant in order to protect his pride, the pride of British colonialism, but kills part of himself. Dorothy rails against poverty and her lack of power in the Church of England, until she experiences more severe deprivation and has to return to her old routine. She has one choice; she could marry Warburton. But because she is asexual, this isn't a real choice. She lives in a mental vacuum.

The contrast between Dorothy and Bozo is "striking" because they both find the "same independence of circumstances" through different means[25] -- Bozo through disbelief and Dorothy through false belief. What they do have in common is a belief

that one can be free inside one's own skull. In order to be truly free in this way, however, one must transcend time. With Dorothy, Orwell "looked back to the wish for a more secure past," and "with Bozo he looks forward to the future, when Orwell's attitudes had hardened and to be a 'free man' inside one's own skull was to have put on the only reliable armour against the unpleasant facts of existence."[24]

In Coming Up for Air and 1984 time and freedom of thought will be major themes. Before Orwell gets around to this, however, he must deal with hedonism in the present.

Chapter III

"Armor and Weapons Against the Unpleasant Facts of Existence"

In this chapter we will see Orwell try to come to terms with the issues of hedonistic, solipsistic passivity and exile. We will draw on several reviews, his essay "Inside the Whale," and in Keep the Aspidistra Flying where he gains a more accommodating attitude toward the middle class. Then he moves toward Socialism in The Road to Wigan Pier and finally becomes a revolutionary socialist in Homage to Catalonia. In Spain he becomes an active member of a united community with a common goal, and experiences subsequent disillusionment which will change his politics forever. With the publication of the latter, he achieves maturity as a writer as he rejects naive optimism and accepts a shocking dose of reality.

A few months after Orwell finished A Clergyman's Daughter, he began writing Aspidistra. While he was writing Aspidistra he published a review of Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer, which begins his discussion of the issue of hedonism and the individual's connection to society. This issue is of interest in this chapter because hedonism may be perceived as diametrically opposed to politics. It may be seen as a non-political and often passive state of being chosen by those who would selfishly detach themselves from society regardless of what is going on. Orwell's special contribution is to point out that hedonism cannot be ignored as a major force in

society, and coming to terms with it is important in order to develop a proper artistic/political perspective. He writes:

> Modern man is rather like a bisected wasp which goes on sucking jam and pretends that the loss of its abdomen does not matter. It is some perception of this fact which brings books like Tropic of Cancer (for there will probably be more and more of them as time goes on) into being (CEJL I 154).

When hedonism is excessive and self-delusory it can jeopardize one's life, just as the wasp will soon die. However, it is okay for the likes of Henry Miller to describe sexual encounters by people who are just as crazy as the wasp because he makes "a definite attempt to get at real facts...brutal though they may be," and because "what he seems to be saying is that if one stiffens oneself by the contemplation of ugliness, one ends by finding life not less but more worth living" (CEJL I 155). Orwell appreciates Miller's art because his encounters are a way to reaffirm the life force. It is questionable whether Miller became a bohemian writer in Paris to contemplate ugliness the way Orwell describes it. Orwell is probably speaking more of himself, as he is wont to do in his literary reviews and essays. No doubt he did find life more worth living as a result of his experiences. Certainly he never found life less worth living. Immediately after he was severely wounded in the neck in the Spanish Civil War he wrote about his "violent resentment at having to leave this world which, when all is said and done, suits me so well" (HTC 186).

Orwell also appreciates Miller's point of view, his ability to stand inside and outside the whale as he notes in a

passage similar to his letter to Brenda Salkeld about Joyce cited in the previous chapter:

> The interest of Tropic of Cancer was that it cast a kind of bridge across the frightful gulf which exists, in fiction, between the intellectual and the man-in-the-street. English fiction on its higher levels is for the most part written by literary gents about literary gents for literary gents; on its lower levels it is generally the most putrid 'escape' stuff ... Books about ordinary people behaving in an ordinary manner are extremely rare, because they can only be written by someone who is capable of standing both inside and outside the ordinary man, as Joyce for instance stands inside and outside Bloom; but this involves admitting that you yourself are an ordinary person for nine-tenths of the time, which is exactly what no intellectual ever wants to do. (CEJL I 230)

In another review, this time of Cyril Connolly's The Rock Pool he writes of the evils of escapist hedonism. He says that the book is about a colony of "expatriates calling themselves artists which were dotted all over France during the nineteen-twenties" (CEJL I 225). The main character starts off to study them in a "scientific way" but is "dragged down to the level of its inhabitants, or even lower." Orwell pans Connolly for the fact that he "rather admires the disgusting beasts he depicts" and sees them, "in their ceaseless war against decency," as "heroic savage tribes struggling against western civilisation" (CEJL I 225). As far as Orwell is concerned, Connolly's characters go beyond innocent hedonism because they are warring against decency, which is a political act which affects other people, and they don't make a constructive contribution to society. Apparently, it's okay to go down and out for the right reasons but Connolly's characters

are only motivated by "a distaste for normal life and common decency." Decency is a key word in Orwell's work, an antidote to escapism and passivism.

Orwell understands escapism because "modern mechanised life becomes dreary if you let it" (CEJL I 226). He writes that some people escape through religion, (like Dorothy), or unending work (like the plongeurs in Down and Out), or through

> a kind of sluttish antinomianism -- lying in bed till four in the afternoon, drinking Pernod...or you will infallibly surrender to the gods of Success and become a London social-cum-literary backstairs-crawler. The third is certainly the worst, but in any case the essential evil is to think in terms of escape. The fact to which we have got to cling, as to a life-belt, is that it is possible to be a normal decent person and yet to be fully alive (CEJL I 226).

This is certainly Orwell's life-belt. Decency is somehow connected to the life force and this connection is emphasized in Orwell's next novel.

Keep the Aspidistra Flying, like Tropic of Cancer, is also about a bohemian, but a bohemian with a conscience. Comstock is a poet-exile who accepts poverty and works in a grimy bookstore (something Orwell himself did) in order to pursue his art, but here most of the parallels end. Comstock detaches himself from society not only to pursue his art but as a way to reject the class structure of capitalist society. He puts on the airs of the hedonist but has no money to drink pernod or do anything hedonistic except for one mad drunken fling. He takes little enjoyment in his retreat from reality, unlike Miller's characters. He complains about his lack of money every step of

the way. When he strives to rejoin the world of the living through nature and sexuality he fails initially. Because of his money fixation, he is unable to make love in a pastoral scene similar to those we've seen in Burmese Days and A Clergyman's Daughter. He fails to merge with nature and woman because he feels powerless. He is like Flory in this respect, but it is through his own fault. In the end he changes and he does the decent thing. He is, so to speak, stiffened by the contemplation of ugliness, realizes he cannot escape from his social obligations and marries pregnant Rosemary. His sex "act" changes his life. Ugliness comes in the form of pictures of Rosemary's foetus which Comstock finds in the library.

> He pored for a long time over the two pictures. Their ugliness made them more credible and therefore more moving...Here was the poor ugly thing, no bigger than a gooseberry, that he had created by his heedless act. Its future, its continued existence perhaps, depended on him... His mind was made up...He felt as though some force outside himself were pushing him (KTAF 234-235).

Because Comstock makes a real commitment to someone other than himself he is less solipsistic than any of Orwell's characters to date. He is more able to "reconcile" his "ingrained likes and dislikes with the essentially public, non-individual activities that this age forces on all of us," to use Orwell's words from "Why I Write".[25] In a polemical passage toward the end of the book as usual, Gordon relates his thoughts about his changes, about leaving the down and out working class to reenter the lower middle class of "small clerks, shop-assistants, commercial travellers, insurance touts, tram

conductors...with a queer feeling that he had only just grown up" (KTAF 239). He says that:

> Our civilisation is founded on greed and fear, but in the lives of common men the greed and fear are mysteriously transmuted into something nobler...they lived by the money-code, sure enough, and yet they contrived to keep their decency...They 'kept themselves respectable' -- kept the aspidistra flying. Besides, they were **alive**. They were bound up in the bundle of life. They begot children, which is what the saints and the soul-savers never by any chance do (KTAF 239).

Connected to the life force, the word decency takes on further meaning in Aspidistra. Comstock keeps the aspidistra flying so that the active and alive forces in the universe will triumph over the passive, death-dealing powers. Decency is good when it means action in society, not solipsism. Dorothy keeps herself respectable, and finds decency in the church which she could not find in the world outside. But Comstock comes alive, unlike Dorothy or Flory, accepts the consequences of his actions and is reborn inside the whale of the womb, rescued from his deathly existence for a so-called decent existence close to home and hearth. This spirit of vivacity helps him to unite mind and nature. But it is the sex act which is the catalyst, not his writing. Because he has to repress his art social forces triumph over the individual again, but with good reason. In Aspidistra art is less important than the good of others.

For Orwell, political writing was primarily concerned with moral issues, not with dogma and doctrine. Kalechofsky has a good definition of what she calls "Orwell's beloved phrase for describing moral rectitude -- 'common decency'":

> It should not be lightly dismissed as banal. Nor can its implications for Orwell be overemphasized. The phrase meant many things to him -- repulsion to cruelty, refusal to employ methods of torture; kindness, elementary courtesy, civil rights; refusal to make things worse for your conquered enemy, respect for the struggles of colonized people, the willingness to risk one's life to fight evil. It was for him a standard for civilization.[26]

For Dorothy, Gordon and Flory, the need to retain or regain their decency and mark out an area of impregnable personal goodness, a base camp, wins out over the longing to escape the world outside, a world which they are born into or put themselves into. "Orwell's emphasis on the inner self and private modes of experience springs from these two seemingly different impulses."[27] However, each base camp is founded on an illusion and is, therefore, a different kind of escapism -- a kind of acceptance actually -- "which Orwell urges to find a place in class life because the tyranny of class and cash are only eliminated from inside by men who possess moral roots."[28] Dorothy doesn't believe in her job but talks herself back into it; in his heart Flory knows Elizabeth cannot share his ideas but deludes himself about love anyway; and Gordon talks himself into enjoying the production of hack advertisements. The longing to escape and the accommodation to reality is a reaction to political and social forces beyond their control -- hence the acceptance. To the extent they cannot control these forces, and must repress their mental and emotional life, they cultivate the reader's sympathy (pathos).

This delusory behavior may be seen as evidence that Orwell has not resolved the tension between his two standards --

individual integrity and political activism. The closest he comes is in Aspidistra, where "the acceptance which he urges is not simply a vague insistence that one must embrace life. It is, rather, an assertion that one must find a place -- and hence an identity -- in the warp and woof of society and, more particularly, in class life"[29]

Orwell's social ideas determine his approach and to the extent that his characters react to these ideas they determine his artistic methodology. In Aspidistra, socioeconomic forces give Orwell a more coherent and unified means of structuring and clarifying experience than heretofore. His class-based solution to Comstock's personal disintegration shows his "nascent socialism, with its insistence on the common culture as a basis for change."[30] He identifies a social problem -- how to change the monetary basis of society in order to be a poet -- and implements a class-based solution. Furthermore "the problem of commitment versus exile, the major theme, is handled through character and image, not as an object of a sociological study"[31] -- and the dramatic prevails over the lyrical because the class problem demands a dramatic context. Comstock's failure to change society is a personal failure but society also fails him. The tension between the individual and society is partly resolved but he must enter the world of advertising, not the world of the arts.

In his next two books, using his observational and participatory techniques once again, Orwell further marks out his politics, testing the effects of social forces on himself

rather than on created characters. He develops, tests and articulates his beliefs in Socialism by participating in and describing the common culture of the workingman in The Road to Wigan Pier and the soldier in Homage to Catalonia. In the second, polemical half of Wigan Pier he explains how he felt when he left Burma and how he still feels:

> I was conscious of an immense weight of guilt that I had got to expiate...I had reduced everything to the simple theory that the oppressed are always right and the oppressors are always wrong: a mistaken theory, but the natural result of being one of the oppressors yourself. I felt that I had got to escape not merely from imperialism but from every form of man's dominion over man. I wanted to submerge myself, to get right down among the oppressed, to be one of them and on their side against their tyrants...At that time failure seemed to me to be the only virtue. Every suspicion of self-advancement, even to 'succeed' in life to the extent of making a few hundreds a year, seemed to me spiritually ugly, a species of bullying. It was in this way that my thoughts turned towards the English working class (WP 149-150).

It seems that Orwell enters the working class with the preconceived notion that he will once and for all find people who are not interested in success and are somehow more virtuous than those from other classes -- a continuation of the search conducted in A Clergyman's Daughter and Aspidistra. By the time he writes Wigan Pier, he has already explored the questionable "virtues" of self-imposed failure and some of the evils of success. He sees Wigan Pier as another chance to submerge himself among the oppressed and be accepted, if not escape, and also hopefully to side with them against the tyrants -- more so than in his other books.

In the mining community he learns that for the working classes of Wigan Pier, acceptance is a fact of life. "A thousand influences constantly press a working man down into a passive role. He does not act, he is acted upon. He feels himself the slave of mysterious authority and has a firm conviction that 'they' will never allow him to do this, that and the other" (WP 50). Orwell sees an important, seemingly insurmountable difference between the classes. He continues: "A person of bourgeois origin goes through life with some expectation of getting what he wants, within reasonable limits." They are no smarter than others, "but they are accustomed to a certain amount of deference and consequently have the cheek necessary to a commander."

Orwell goes to great lengths to become one of the miners and his art is well crafted, but he fails. He goes inside the whale, into the mines which are remarkably similar to the plongeur's cellar in Down and Out and also echo Aspidistra. In the beginning, Comstock's life in the Lambeth slum is introduced thusly: "Underground, underground! Down in the safe soft womb of earth...That was where he wished to be" (KTFA 203).

> The time to go there is when the machines are roaring and the air is black with coal dust, and when you can actually see what the miners have to do. At those times the place is like hell, or at any rate like my own mental picture of hell. Most of the things one imagines in hell are there -- heat, noise, confusion, darkness, foul air, and, above all, unbearably cramped space. Everything except the fire, for there is no fire down there except the feeble beams of Davy lamps and electric torches which scarcely penetrate the clouds of coal dust (WP 23).

Wigan Pier has been called by Raymond Williams, that preeminent Orwell critic, the best example of how Orwell writes as "the man inside and outside the experience...Realizing his experience -- not only what had happened to him and what he had observed, but what he felt about it and what he thought about it."[32] For example, the description just cited was preceded by an "outside" polemic on the same page: "Our civilisation, pace Chesterton, is founded on coal, more completely than one realises until one stops to think about it. The machines that keep us alive, and the machines that make the machines, are all directly or indirectly dependent upon coal." The way Orwell brings his art and polemics together is inspired in Wigan Pier. The interest generated by the descriptions of the miners helps to carry the polemical second half, which consists largely of arguments about socialism and the class structure. Orwell's persona is very much present: The observer is a real created character "used to important effect in the second half...an essential link between the two parts... 'inside' and then 'outside' the experience,"[33]) but all of this is not enough.

The miners know he is from the middle class -- he makes no pretence to be otherwise as he did in Down and Out; an honest approach to be sure but a barrier to acceptance nonetheless. There are also severe limits to Orwell's active participation in the first half of the book because he cannot work in these conditions. He joined the brotherhood of plongeurs, but he cannot take an active job in the mines because he is too tall. The fearsome gloom suggests those ancient cave myths that

bring life out of death in the deeps of the earth but there is no place for Orwell in the underworld of the coal miner. The work would kill him. His sensitivity to the reality of the situation, and resultant sense of inferiority (with perhaps some leftover guilt?) also keep Orwell from getting even closer to this culture. He tries to use his powers of lyrical description but doesn't quite succeed. He talks about his inferiority:

> Indeed the Lancashire and Yorkshire miners treated me with a kindness and courtesy that were even embarrassing; for if there is one type of man to whom I do feel myself inferior, it is a coal-miner. Certainly no one showed any sign of despising me for coming from a different part of the country (WP 115).

Orwell doesn't feel that it is possible to be deeply, actively involved with the working class which restricts his development as a character. He admires the working-class home but he feels he cannot be "of" it. "You breathe a warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere which is is not so easy to find elsewhere...a manual worker...has a better chance of being happy than an 'educated man'" (WP 117).

In another submersion image he goes on to describe the working man's home which "seems to fall more naturally into a sane and comely shape." He writes:

> Especially on winter evenings after tea, when the fire glows in the open range and dances mirrored in the steel fender, when Father, in shirt-sleeves, sits in the rocking chair at one side of the fire reading the racing finals, and Mother sits on the other with her sewing, and the children are happy with a pennorth of mint humbugs, and the dog lolls roasting himself on the rag mat -- it is a good place to be in, provided that you can be not only in it but sufficiently of it to be taken for granted (WP 117-118).

Orwell doesn't feel he can get inside the whale to be "of" the working class, accepted into their ranks, because of the "curse of class difference" (WP 157) and even his lyrical powers are not enough to bring him in. "There is no short cut into their midst. You can become a tramp simply by putting on the right clothes and going to the nearest casual ward, but you can't become a navvy or a coal-miner" (WP 156). The crucial difference is that the tramps recognize him as another tramp, but the working class does not. Furthermore, in Down and Out, Orwell did not drag his past with him. "Once you are in that world and seemingly of it, it hardly matters what you have been in the past. It is a sort of world-within-a-world where everyone is equal, a small squalid democracy -- perhaps the nearest thing to a democracy that exists in England" (D&O 156).

Orwell does not solve his class problem, he intensifies the discussion and raises another issue -- the role that the past plays in defining one's identity and class consciousness. In Down and Out he sheds his past and gets rid of some of his own class prejudice when he makes friends with the tramps and plongeurs (D&O 155) but in Wigan Pier he is just one of the "shock-absorbers of the bourgeoisie" (WP 143), an "intermediary who goes around and to whom things happen."[34] He even describes himself as a "degenerate modern semi-intellectual who would die if I did not get my early morning cup of tea and my New Statesman every Friday" (WP 208). He comes to the realization that "to abolish class-distinctions means abolishing a part of yourself" (WP). This realization leads him to think about the

importance of the past and memory, one's personal and social record inscribed in the mind and sometimes in official documents -- a fixation which will follow him through to 1984.

At first glance, this wish to abolish part of oneself seems to seriously compromise Orwell's belief in the integrity of the individual, but if he believes in abolishing part of himself, it is only as a stimulus to replace that part with something else by taking an activist stance. In Wigan Pier he rejects the phony Socialism of the "tract-writing type of Socialist, with his pullover, his fuzzy hair, and his Marxian quotation" (WP 178). He rejects this phony Socialist's view that "poverty and, what is more, the habits of mind created by poverty, are something to be abolished **from above**, by violence if necessary..." (WP 179). He is ready to intervene, to go to war in Spain and change society not from outside, but from below and within in what he believes will be a working class revolution.

He wants to be in it and of it and, in Homage to Catalonia, produces his best piece of sustained reporting, though it is one of his most neglected books. There is a visible break from his concern with personal and individual options to a common cause, and from passivism to activism. Orwell's description of Barcelona and the common cause when he first enters Spain foreshadows the dystopia of 1984:

> Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal. Servile and even ceremonial forms of speech had temporarily disappeared...Tipping had been forbidden by law since the time of Primo de Rivera; almost my first experience was receiving a lecture from an

> hotel manager for trying to tip a lift-boy. There were no private motor cars, they had all been commandeered...the loud-speakers were bellowing revolutionary songs all day and far into the night...In outward appearance it was a town in which the wealthy classes had practically ceased to exist...Practically everyong wore rough working-class clothes, or blue overalls or some variant of the militia uniform (HTC 5).

The way he uses the limited narrator gives his theme a dramatic context.[35] He is able to do this because he has a "greater clarity of idea than ever before. It is as if his discovery of forthrightness and simplicity in a concrete and uncommon way resulted in similar qualities in Homage to Catalonia."[36] During his six months in Spain, Orwell becomes a revolutionary socialist, a believer in Democratic Socialism to be precise. Until now, we have followed him though poverty, rejection of many of the tenets of English society and imperialism -- through wandering, vagrant years. In Spain he once again experiences shared hardships but at a different level. He becomes actively involved "in the struggle to end them...His previously passive belief in a common cause (is) realized and released by the revolutionary experience."[37]

It is a struggle which is complicated by a number of mitigating circumstances. While he glories in a golden period of equality with other men, his sense of frustration grows deeper. Because of his education and training as an officer cadet, and in the Imperial Police, he believes in efficiency -- but he is given ancient weapons and poorly made ammunition. When he gives orders to his men, they are free to obey or disobey, which is not a great way to run an army. He believes

heartily in the common cause of the oppressed, but is impatient with political divisions that prevent its fulfillment. Orwell is again caught between what he wants and what the political system has to offer, but now he is really involved in the political system, fighting against the ruling elite, not just the socially organized caste system he had known in France, England, and in a more intensified scale in Burma. The result: Orwell is no longer just a vagrant, he is a revolutionary. But he is also an exile -- that symbol of modern alienation -- a man on the run. In Homage he says "The essential point is that all this time I had been isolated -- for at the front one was almost completely isolated from the outside world: even of what was happening in Barcelona one had only a dim conception..." (HTC 102). It is Williams in Culture and Society who makes this distinction between vagrant and exile. He says "there is usually a principle in exile, there is always only relaxation in vagrancy. Orwell, in different parts of his career, is both exile and vagrant."[38]

This isolation leads to boredom and disillusionment. Orwell says that he is bored by "the political side of the war" (HTC 58), but he is sufficiently interested to strive to see it simply as class conflict and "sets himself up for disillusionment."[39] By the end of the book, after a long descent, he becomes a victim of the mass frame up of the P.O.U.M. militia by the Communists. This process is the central theme of the book. When he remains on the front lines with his comrades, socialism is real but when he steps back he discovers he is living an illusion:

> The revolutionary atmosphere remained as I had first known it. General and private, peasant and militaman, still met as equals; everyone drew the same pay, wore the same clothes, ate the same food and called everyone else 'thou' and 'comrade'; there was no boss-class, no menial-class, no beggars, no prostitutes, no lawyers, no priests, no boot-licking, no captouching. I was breathing the air of equality, and I was simple enough to imagine that it existed all over Spain. I did not realize that more or less by chance I was isolated among the most revolutionary section of the Spanish working class (HTC 66-67).

Orwell is forced by his isolation to rely once again on his wits as an individual and to retreat to England to avoid incarceration or worse in Spain.

With his own freedom threatened, his hopes fade for Democratic Socialism, which he believes should have justice and liberty at its core. In order to "affirm liberty, he is forced to deny its inevitable social basis: all he can fall back on is the notion of an atomistic society, which will leave individuals alone."[40] If one is left alone then one might as well have escaped from society. It amounts to the same thing.

Orwell is far from indifferentism which he admits in Wigan Pier was natural until "quite recently" but is now becoming "difficult and even unfashionable" (WP 209). But he has not found the formula to reach the masses. He is a "victim, a man who, while rejecting the consequences of an atomistic society, yet retains deeply, in himself, its characteristic mode of consciousness,"[41] a mode of consciousness which he feels he must transcend to achieve his goal, to "fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole."[42]

Chapter IV

"Transcendence and the Myth of the Common Man"

In this chapter we will see how Orwell searches for a replacement for decency, which is no longer the ultimate solution to his quest. He goes deep inside the whale of sensation and imagination in search of a transcendent state of mind sufficient to combat the political ills of the time. He leans toward pacifism as a compromise between passivism and political activism but comes up against the reality of World War II, and his common man myth undergoes a crucial artistic modification.

When Orwell decides to go back to England he does so to escape, but he does not give up his cause. When he leaves Spain he is motivated by an "overwhelming desire to get away from it all; away from the horrible atmosphere of political suspicion and hatred, from streets thronged by armed men, from air-raids, trenches, machine-guns, screaming trams, milkless tea, oil cookery, and shortage of cigarettes -- from almost everything that I had learned to associate with Spain" (HTC 200). This is a perfectly natural response after what he has been through. But he has not given up stumping for a social structure which allows the individual to realize his potential, as he relates in "Why I Write," published years later in 1946:

> The Spanish war and other events in 1936-37 turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood. Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been

> written, directly or indirectly, **against** totalitarianism and **for** democratic Socialism...the more one is conscious of one's political bias, the more chance one has of acting politically without sacrificing one's aesthetic and intellectual integrity...What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art"[43]

He has not given up trying "to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's idea of the kind of society that they should strive after."[44] In mid-1938, while in a sanatorium with a tubercular lesion in one lung, he acts politically by joining the Independent Labour Party and projects his next novel, Coming Up for Air.

This book, which is filled with nostalgia for the days of childhood, and home and hearth once again, is also a natural response to what he has been through over the years, and presents "a vision of reality quite similar to that which Orwell detected in the novels of Henry Miller."[45] It is the last traditional novel he will write and the only one completely devoted to a typical middle class character who remains middle class throughout the story.

In order to understand how Coming Up for Air came into being, it helps to trace Orwell's thinking prior to and concurrent with writing it. We will also see how the essay "Inside the Whale," much of which is about Miller, describes Orwell's art in this book, and how both the essay and book help to launch him on the path to 1984.

Before he begins the book, when he announces his reasons for joining the ILP, he talks briefly about his struggle as a writer to engage in politics, foreshadowing his later words in

"Why I Write." "The impulse of every writer is to 'keep out of politics'...to be left alone so that he can go on writing books in peace." He then admits this isn't practicable when the "era of free speech is closing down," probably a reaction to his experiences in Spain, but "he will continue to write, with the realization that writing books is not enough" (CEJL I 336-37). His desire to write about something peaceful is emerging as a reaction to his trials and tribulations.

Coming Up for Air centers on a theme Orwell "considered appropriate to an age on the verge of sweeping changes -- the common man, with his sexual uneasiness and his political disillusionment."[46] George Bowling is Orwell's "final attempt at a Bloom figure,"[47] who will be inside and outside the whale. He focuses on the topic of childhood because, for Orwell, the revivification of the writing impulse and an assessment of a writer's motives is directly connected with the writer's early development. "His subject-matter will be determined by the age he lives in -- but before he ever begins to write he will have acquired an emotional attitude from which he will never completely escape...if he escapes from his early influences altogether, he will have killed his impulse to write."[48] Furthermore, in one of his most memorable quotes, he adds:

> I do not want completely to abandon the world-view that I acquired in childhood. So long as I remain alive and well I shall continue to feel strongly about prose style, to love the surface of the earth, and to take pleasure in solid objects and scraps of useless information. It is no use trying to suppress that side of myself.[49]

Coming Up for Air also seems to be a way for him to deal with a period of fluctuation in his politics and in world politics. He remains a democratic socialist, but he seems to be waging an internal struggle centering around the notion of pacifism, in addition to the one we have been tracing which has to do with passivism -- and the two are linked. Also in 1938, although Hitler is in power, Orwell uncharacteristically defends the anti-war movement, saying that genuine revolutionary change can only start when the masses "refuse capitalist-imperialist war...So long as they show themselves willing to fight 'in defence of democracy,' or 'against Fascism,' or for any other flyblown slogan, the same trick will be played upon them again and again: 'You can't have a rise in wages **now**, because we have got to prepare for war. Guns before butter!" (CEJL 331-32). Shortly after, reviewing Borkenau's The Communist International, he speaks in favor of a genuine revolutionary movement which will use violence if necessary, "but which does not lose touch, as Communism and Fascism have done, with the essential values of democracy" (CEJL I 350). A few months after starting Coming Up he writes to Herbert Read from Marrakech, where he is now convalescing on doctor's orders, and calls for opposing the coming war and "organizing illegal anti-war activities"... and formation of "an underground organisation as well" (CEJL I 378).

Orwell is feeling like an exile. The second World War is about to break out, leading to a feeling around the world of helplessness and confusion. Furthermore, he is bitterly

dissatisfied with the left-wing intelligentsia. With the defeat of the Spanish loyalists the left's rhetoric has become so much redundant verbiage in his opinion. Coming Up for Air is his best novel. It is not primarily a political novel, but Orwell does express his impatience with leftist word-mongering in the section which describes the talk George Bowling attended on "The Menace of Fascism," sponsored by the Left Book Club:

> You know the line of talk. These chaps can churn it out by the hour. Just like a gramophone. Turn the handle, press the button and it starts. Democracy, Fascism, Democracy. But somehow it interested me to watch him...What's he doing? Quite deliberately, and quite openly, he's stirring up hatred (CUFA 171-72)

Once again, Orwell is foreshadowing 1984, where hatred will be a powerful force. A few pages later Bowling offers his prophecies about what will happen after World War II, in a further foreshadowing:

> It isn't the war that matters, it's the after-war. The world we're going down into, the kind of hate-world, slogan-world. The coloured shirts, the barbed wire, the rubber truncheons. The secret cells where the electric light burns night and day, and the detectives watching you while you sleep. And the processions and the posters with enormous faces, and the crowds of a million people all cheering for the Leader till they deafen themselves into thinking that they really workshop him, and all the time, underneath, they hate him so that they want to puke. It's all going to happen. Or isn't it? Some days I know it's impossible, other days I know it's inevitable (CUFA 176).

Is it impossible or inevitable? Orwell's confusion is evident in this polemical passage. If totalitarianism is inevitable, drastic measures are needed to keep it from happening. Shortly thereafter, speaking to another member of the audience, Bowling takes an anti-war stance, even though he

is a war veteran. He then leaves the hall, eager to discuss the subject further, and pays a visit to old Porteous. Porteous however, is lost in history. His mind "probably stopped working at about the time of the Russo-Japanese war. And it's a ghastly thing that nearly all the decent people, the people who **don't** want to go round smashing faces in with spanners, are like that. They're decent, but their minds have stopped...They think that England will never change" (CUFA 188). In other words, they're stuck inside the whale, an essentially pacifist and passive state of affairs which springs from stagnation. Decency is no longer enough, and Orwell searches for a replacement.

The voice in this polemical passage is that of George Bowling, but the tone is Orwell's. Even though the entire book is written in the first person, this section could belong to a narrator. It doesn't fit the character who, because of the nature of his aspirations, is much less activist and political, and not educated enough to be able to think deeply about such subjects, nor is he the type to mingle with the likes of Porteous, one of the professorial class. Orwell's art and politics are not closely allied in this passage. Nevertheless, he mentions the theme of the book: Bowling's search for the pastoral delights of unchangeable England, his passionate wish to escape from his dull routine as an insurance salesman and recover part of his lost childhood in Lower Binfield, because he is not happy just being decent (he also looks up an old girlfriend). Bowling's search is in the past, primarily

focused on a variety of submersion images, including the central symbol of the deep fishing pool whose mysteries have never been plumbed by anyone. Bowling hopes to find happiness in an atomistic society of his choosing before World War II breaks loose.

He just wants to be left alone. He escapes from his wife, Hilda, and his two kids because he's "got something else inside me, chiefly a hangover from the past...I'm fat, but I'm thin inside. Has it ever struck you that there's a thin man inside every fat man, just as they say there's a statue inside every block of stone?" (CUFA 23). If the fat man is ugly with his false teeth, then the thin man he's referring to must be beautiful -- and so he is. Orwell is a master of description. His descriptions of Edwardian England are an artistic triumph, and apparently a fully created piece of work not based on his real-life experiences. What wonderful memories he invents of Bowling's youth when it seemed to be summer all the year round:

> with a sort of sleepy dusty hush over everything and the carrier's horse with his nose dug well into his nose-bag, munching away, or it's a hot afternoon in the great green juicy meadows round the town, or it's about dusk in the lane behind the allotments, and there's a smell of pipe-tobacco and night-stocks floating through the hedge (CUFA 42).

What memories Bowling has of "Church" and the stories of "sacrificing burnt offerings, walking about in fiery furnaces, getting nailed on crosses, getting swallowed by whales. And all mixed up with the sweet graveyard smell and the serge dresses and the wheeze of the organ" (CUFA 35).

Here, the symbol of the whale appears for the first time. It appears again on the next page (CUFA 36) where "Vicky's at Windsor, God's in heaven, Christ's on the cross, Jonah's in the whale..." Then it appears when Bowling describes how his father would talk about "the chap (I notice that to this day he turns up in the Sunday papers about once in three years) who was swallowed by a whale in the Red Sea and taken out three days later, alive but bleached white by the whale's gastric juice" (CUFA 53). When he refers to the books he read he says that "I swallowed them all down like a whale that's got in among a shaol of shrimps"(CUFA 142). By the time he tells about the secret pool, the monstrous fishes "sailing round it" in his young eyes could easily be whales! Time and circumstances prevent Bowling from ever trying to catch those fish, lending a sense of pathos to his story. When he consummates his relationship with Elsie, the pastoral setting is near the pool, but not near enough to see the fish which he badly wants to see. The search for woman replaces his pastoral joys. After lovemaking he says "the big carp faded out of my mind again, and in fact for years afterwards I hardly thought about them" (CUFA 123).

When he does think of them years later it is with the hope of an escape back to the pool in Lower Binfield, accompanied by guilt which surfaces as he thinks about his return and imagines a huge army of people who would try to stop him: "There's a chap who thinks he's going to escape! There's a chap who says he won't be stream-lined! He's going back to Lower Binfield!

After him! Stop him!" (CUFA 206). When he finally gets there he imagines he's in the ocean, experiencing a kind of hallucination where "instead of the tables and chairs he'd see the wavy waterweed and the great crabs and cuttlefish reaching out to get him" (CUFA 235).

In Coming Up for Air, the theme of escape and the search for transcendence is more powerfully portrayed than in any other novel. The degree of escapism is directly related to the amount of freedom allotted to the protagonist. Returning to Spain, Orwell gives Bowling a considerable amount of freedom to try to satisfy his whims. The theme is also more powerfully developed because Bowling's search lies in the past and in his memory, which opens the door to a flood of images, smells, tastes and other sensations -- Orwell's forte. And moving into another time zone is the best possible escape -- when memories are pleasant. But Bowling worries about the future, with good reason, and his efforts to escape turn sour. The threat of the Second World War disturbs Bowling's idyll. Before we look for other signs of Orwell's reemergent pessimism and despair, which will point us toward the final stage in his career, let us more closely examine the rationale behind and the significance of the whale symbol.

The first essay to give evidence of Orwell's new thoughts after his return from Spain is "Inside the Whale," whose most ostensible subject is Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer. Later the title of the essay will serve as the name of a collection of essays. This is a famous essay in its own right, and one of

the most important documents of Orwell's autobiography. Dudley Young says it is "arguably still the best single guide to 20th century English literature."[50] Of course he is refering to pre-1940, when the essay was written.

Orwell first met Miller at the end of 1936, when he (Orwell) was passing through Paris on his way to Spain. He writes:

> What most intrigued me about him was to find that he felt no interest in the Spanish war whatever. He merely told me in forcible terms that to go to Spain at that moment was the act of an idiot...my ideas about combating Fascism, defending democracy, etc. etc. were all boloney. Our civilization was destined to be swept away and replaced by something so different that we should scarcely regard it as human -- a prospect that did not bother him, he said.[51]

This conversation has a profound influence on Orwell, probably because he shares Miller's pessimism about civilization. Orwell got the idea for the title after reading a book by Miller in which Miller compares Anais Nin to Jonah in the whale's belly and says he finds the idea of being swallowed by a whale rather attractive.

> It is quite obvious why. The whale's belly is simply a womb big enough for an adult. There you are, in the dark, cushioned space that exactly fits you, with yards of blubber between yourself and reality, able to keep up an attitude of the completest indifference, no matter what happens...Short of being dead, it is the final, unsurpassable stage of irresponsibility. And however it may be with Anais Nin, there is no question that Miller himself is inside the whale...Not that he is especially introverted - quite the contrary. In his case the whale happens to be transparent. Only he feels no impulse to alter or control the process that he is undergoing. he has performed the essential Jonah act of allowing himself to be swallowed, remaining passive, accepting...It is a species of quietism, implying either complete unbelief or else a degree of belief amounting to mysticism (ITW 133-34).

As we saw in the last chapter of this thesis Orwell praises Miller because he gets at the real facts of daily life. In "Inside the Whale" he praises Miller more vociferously for a variety of other reasons as well, including possible mysticism. Miller is Orwell's Mr. Warburton, "a happy man. He seemed to Orwell the best representative yet of the post-liberal imagination. He thought he had found a writer who had gone beyond the liberal imagination instead of returning to versions before it"[52]

At this stage in his life, Orwell the writer and exile is susceptible to Miller's influence because of Miller's ability to alleviate solitude and isolation. Orwell feels that Miller has some of the qualities of his idol James Joyce because he can "break down, at any rate momentarily, the solitude in which the human being lives" (ITW 109) -- even though "exile is probably more damaging to a novelist than to a painter or even a poet, because its effect is to take him out of contact with working life and narrow down his range to the street, the cafe, the church, the brothel and the studio" (ITW 109-110). However, this realization of the dangers of exile is not enough to prevent Orwell from ignoring the working class in Coming Up for Air and even taking his character out of contact with reality in search of an illusory fishing pool.

He also identifies with Miller because he owns up to "everyday facts and everyday emotions" (ITW 110) and uses the English language as it is spoken "without fear, i.e. without fear of rhetoric or of the unusual or poetical word. The

adjective has come back, after ten years' exile. It is a flowing, swelling prose, a prose with rhythms in it, something quite different from the flat, cautious statements and snack-bar dialects that are now in fashion" (ITW 111). Orwell has great admiration for fearlessness because, combined with honesty and decency, it leads to happiness and enjoyment, even in the face of endless struggle, and it helps to also be "accepting" (ITW 112). Orwell notes that "Tropic of Cancer ends with an especially Whitmanesque passage, in which, after the lecheries, the swindles, the fights, the drinking bouts and the imbecilities, he simply sits down and watches the Seine flowing past, in a sort of mystical acceptance of the thing-as-it-is" (ITW 113). From an artistic point of view, according to Orwell, fearlessness leads to good novels: "good novels are not written by orthodoxy-sniffers, nor by people who are conscience-stricken about their own unorthodoxy. Good novels are written by people who are not frightened" (ITW 131). Through a close reading of Orwell's essay, one can see several factors which bring about fear or the lack of fear. It's easier not to be frightened if one is in a prosperous, free country in times of peace, or if one imposes peace on one's world by becoming a pacifist or sticking one's head in the sand. The dilemma of the artist versus the thinker is greater than in his previous works.

Orwell postulates that Walt Whitman might have not written Leaves of Grass if he were alive in the nineteen-thirties.

> For what he (Whitman) is saying, after all, is 'I accept', and there is a radical difference between acceptance now and acceptance then. Whitman was writing in a time of unexampled prosperity, but more than that, he was writing in a country where freedom was something more than a word...There was poverty and there were even class-distinctions, but except for the Negroes there was no permanently submerged class...Miller's outlook is deeply akin to that of Whitman (ITW 112-113).

On the other hand, too much prosperity is not good either, in Orwell's world view. He refers to the English writers of the twenties and wonders why they were predominantly pessimistic. The note of cynicism here is hard to miss.

> Why always the sense of decadence, the skulls and cactuses, the yearning after lost faith and impossible civilizations? Was it not, after all, because these people were writing in an exceptionally comfortable epoch? It is just at such times that 'cosmic despair' can flourish. People with empty bellies never despair of the universe, nor even think about the universe, for that matter....As for the twenties, they were the golden age of the rentier-intellectual, a period of irresponsibility such as the world had never before seen. The war was over, the new totalitarian states had not yet arisen...(ITW 122)

In the thirties, Orwell continues, the English intelligentsia who flocked into the Communist Party also had their heads in the sand. The "softness and security of life in England" aided and abetted the "cult of Russia" among the "soft-boiled emancipated middle class who were too young to have effective memories of the Great War," and who swallowed totalitarianism "because they have no experience of anything except liberalism" (ITW 128).

This is the paradox of the self-exile of George Orwell. If the writer is liberal by nature, and since "what is happening is the destruction of liberalism" he cannot help to

bring the new society into being as a writer (ITW 138), and if he tries to do so he is liable to succumb to false ideology. "A writer does well to keep out of politics" (ITW 130). You need a full belly in order to think about the universe, but if you're too comfortable or disconnected from politics you're also liable to succumb to false immorality, irresponsibility and false "cosmic despair."

Orwell leans toward pacifism, but when criticizing Miller's type of pacifism -- which is a "merely personal pacifism, an individual refusal to fight, with no apparent wish to convert others to the same opinion" -- he feels that pacifism amounts to "a declaration of irresponsibility" (ITW 132). Apparently it's okay to be a pacifist if you take an activist stance and try to convert others to your point of view. Orwell cannot tolerate irresponsibility, and the best way a pacifist can prove responsibility is through words. The pacifist attitude is the closest Orwell comes to a compromise on his major theme. The pacifist can sit back and let things happen and physically ignore the historical process, and also fight against it directly or indirectly with art and polemic. Miller fights indirectly.

> If they can ignore it (the historical process), they are probably fools. If they can understand it well enough to want to fight against it, they probably have enough vision to realize that they cannot win...Miller's work is symptomatically important in its avoidance of any of these attitudes. He is neither pushing the world-process forward nor trying to drag it back, but on the other hand he is by no means ignoring it. I should say that he believes in the impending ruin of western civilization much more firmly than the majority of "revolutionary" writers; only he does not feel called upon to do anything

> about it. He is fiddling while Rome is burning, and, unlike the enormous majority of people who do this, fiddling with his face towards the flames (ITW 132).

This description might aptly be applied to George Bowling. Orwell's admiration is clear for Miller's courage and fearlessness and ability to write about the common man, even if the common man is an artist. Furthermore, a statement Orwell made in "Inside the Whale" when discussing other writes could be applied to Miller. Miller cares about life with some emotional intensity, and "for a creative writer possession of the 'truth' is less important than emotional sincerity" (ITW 135). But there's no getting around the fact that Miller introduced "a totally new impulse in Orwell's mind, an impulse of quietism and despair. He represents a radical and not easily answered challenge to Orwell's previous values and beliefs." [53] In Coming Up for Air, Orwell tries to answer this challenge.

Bowling's Milleresque quest to revive the Edwardian myth of the autonomous self, the narcissistic emphasis on the personal and private which was the artistic ideal in the 1930's,[54] does not succeed. He cannot get back inside the whale for good, only temporarily in his imagination and memory. Nor can he lose himself in escapist literature of a saner age, or "escape the thought of war" (CUFA 230) and come up for air by retrieving the past. At one point Bowling feels that "The very thought of going back to Lower Binfield had done me good already...Coming up for air! Like the big sea-turtles when they come paddling up to the surface, stick their noses out and

fill their lungs with a great gulp before they sink down again among the seaweed and the octopuses" (CUFA 198). But he also contradicts himself on the very same page:

> Wherever we're going, we're going downwards. Into the grave, into the cesspool -- no knowing...There's something that's gone out of us in these twenty years since the war. It's a kind of vital juice that we've squirted away until there's nothing left. All this rushing to and fro! Everlasting scramble for a bit of cash. Everlasting din of buses, bombs, radios, telephone bells. Nerves worn all to bits, empty places in our bones where the marrow ought to be.

Furthermore, there is no peace in the modern world because people have lost their feeling of security, or more precisely -- their "feeling of continuity" (CUFA 125). In the past people knew they had to die, "and I suppose a few of them knew they were going to go bankrupt, but what they didn't know was that the order of things could change" (CUFA 125). They knew that "individually they were finished,but their way of life would continue. Their good and evil would remain good and evil. They didn't feel the ground they stood on shifting under their feet" (CUFA 126).

Bowling fruitlessly dabbles in politics but, like Miller, at least his face is fearlessly to the flames. He believes that World War I was responsible for this state of affairs in society. "People who in a normal way would have gone through life with about as much tendency to think for themselves as suet pudding were turned into Bolshies just by the war...After that unspeakable idiotic mess you couldn't go on regarding society as something eternal and unquestionable..." (CUFA 144).

He is speaking of a fundamental change in the historical process itself. Another war is coming and there isn't any air, figuratively speaking, but this isn't just because of the war. There will never be any air again. "The dustbin that we're in reaches up to the stratosphere" (CUFA 257). And "there'll be no more fishing this side the grave" (CUFA 266).

> The old life's finished, and to go about looking for it is just waste of time. There's no way back to Lower Binfield, you can't put Jonah back into the whale...It's all going to happen...The bombs, the food-queues, the rubber truncheons, the barbed wire, the coloured shirts, the slogans, the enormous faces, the machine-guns squirting out of bedroom windows. It's all going to happen. I know it -- at any rate, I knew it then. There's no escape. Fight against it if you like, or look the other way and pretend not to notice...but there's no way out (CUFA 267).

Is there then no hope? In "Inside the Whale" Orwell talks about the books of personal reminiscence written about the war of 1914-18. The ones that have artistic value because they've survived the test of time "are written from a passive, negative angle. They are the records of something completely meaningless, a nightmare happening in a void" (CUFA 135). They succeed because they are about the soldier's "helplessness and his ignorance" and are not designed around "a pretended power to see the whole thing in perspective...the best (of the books) were nearly all the work of people who simply turned their backs and tried not to notice that the war was happening" (CUFA 135). If there is hope, it is in the survival value of art. But what if books and art are forbidden or somehow stamped out of existence? Orwell is getting closer to the nightmare of 1984:

> At this date it hardly even needs a war to bring home to us the disintegration of our society and the increasing helplessness of all decent people. It is for this reason that I think that the passive, non-cooperative attitude implied in Henry Miller's work is justified...Almost certainly we are moving into an age of totalitarian dictatorships -- an age in which freedom of thought will be at first a deadly sin and later on a meaningless abstraction. The autonomous individual is going to be stamped out of existence. But this means that literature, in the form in which we know it, must suffer at least a temporary death. The literature of liberalism is coming to an end and the literature of totalitarianism has not yet appeared and is barely imaginable (137)...Progress and reaction have both turned out to be swindles. Seemingly there is nothing left but quietism -- robbing reality of its terrors by simply submitting to it. Get inside the whale - or rather, admit that you are inside the whale (for you are, of course). Give yourself over to the world-process, stop fighting against it or pretending that you control it; simply accept it, endure it, record it (CUFA 138).

"The word 'endure' in this passage best emphasises the new note of pessimism that enters Orwell's life at the start of the forties...And yet words such as 'seemingly' show that there are reservations lying behind Orwell's commitment to pessimism."[55] It is possible that Miller strongly influenced Orwell's choice of theme and structure in 1984. He got Orwell thinking about the whole topic of quietism, so that 1984 centers on the passive attitude of the masses, not just individuals. Orwell's growing disillusion with Miller, manifest in his review of The Cosmological Eye in 1946, influences him to take a more critical approach to the subject of passivism by the time he writes 1984. He calls Miller's opinions in this book "mostly commonplace, and often reactionary. They boil down to a sort of nihilistic quietism. He disclaims interest in politics...but in fact he is constantly making political

pronouncements... He is an extreme pacifist and on the other hand has a yearning for violence...He refuses to bother about the difference between Fascism and Communism, because 'society is made up of individuals' (CEJL IV 108).

Orwell still believes this attitude toward society could be "respectable" but only "if it were carried to its logical conclusion, which would mean remaining passive in the face of war, revolution, Fascism or anything else (CEJL IV 108). As long as you believe in your point of view, and have the courage of your convictions -- even if you're wrong -- you're okay in Orwell's opinion. The problem is, the quietist attitude seems to have a fundamental weakness. It requires the sheltering atmosphere and protection of bourgeois-democratic society and recognizes no obligations to anyone else. "When a real choice has to be made, the quietist attitude never seems to survive" (CEJL IV 109).

Nevertheless, there is hardly a major essay throughout the rest of his life in which Orwell does not use Miller's outlook to attack left-wing rhetoric for its unrealism "that makes possible the continuing aggression of an atavistic Fascism...He commends the determinedly personal and honest and 'irresponsible' outlook of a Henry Miller; it is one way of attacking the public vision of socialist writers, which for Orwell is not only innacurate and unviable, but dangerous."[56] Miller writes about the common man, and these socialists, rhetoric to the contrary, are disconnected from the proletariat. They play with fire but they don't know that fire is hot.

"The main facts about 'Inside the Whale' in terms of Orwell's autobiography are that "his common man myth "underwent its crucial modification: If it's not possible to be common, at least it's possible to write common prose."[57] And this prose proposes "a new manner of understanding both literature and experience,"[58] a symbolist manner. "Orwell's sympathy (to Miller's temper) marks the loosening of the imagination from its old liberal forms."[59] Miller gets Orwell thinking about alternative forms of literature, so that he abandons the traditional novel after Coming Up for Air.

Orwell still believes in the common man, he just loses faith in his own ability to change the class structure and achieve a transcendent state in which the individual and society are one and mind and nature are united. We have seen him explore various ways to get beyond the limitations of present circumstances, with varying success. In Down and Out and The Road to Wigan Pier concern with the future is displaced by present poverty. If you're poor you haven't the energy to worry about the future. Homage to Catalonia represents a different underworld beyond time, a common culture of men in wartime. The future may be always in their thoughts but this is not primarily why Orwell is interested in their company. He finds the perfect society of equals in the present, not in a hoped-for future. Flory in Burmese Days and Bowling in Coming Up for Air both look to nature in order to transcend the present but eventually turn away. Bowling, cannot retrieve the natural world he remembers because it has been changed by the

passage of time and the ravages of man. Out of a sense of religious guilt, Dorothy in A Clergyman's Daughter also rejects her pantheistic, transcendent desires, and finds no real substitute. She falls victim to amnesia which enables her to temporarily escape her present circumstances, to go from the frying pan to the fire. Gordon Comstock searches for escape in poverty, the underworld, nature, drink, and art. To find security, however, he must give up his political ideals and go back to his former life.

By the time he writes 1984, Orwell has come to the realization that there is no escape to the past, back inside the whale, and the future is grim. Nevertheless, he takes on the theme of escape once again, with a greater sense of desperation. The essence of time itself becomes a principal theme represented even in the title of the book. The symbolist point of view Orwell used in Coming Up for Air stays with him in 1984, which is more genuinely a work of symbolist art than anything he ever wrote before.

Chapter V

"The Crystal Spirit and Death Inside the Whale"

In 1936, when Orwell wrote his critical review of Miller's Black Spring, he said: "The truth is that the written word loses its power if it departs too far, or rather if it stays away too long, from the ordinary world where two and two make four" (CEJL I 231). One might add that human consciousness itself loses power along with the loss of the written word, even to the point of insanity, as we see by the end of 1984, where the protagonist is forced to believe that two and two make five. He even deludes himself that he has come up with this belief on his own. In this chapter we will discuss the significance to this thesis of Orwell's tests of the limits of the power of the word and of consciousness in his last two books, as he shakes the very foundation of the active-passive duality, the belief that mind and nature are one.

According to Edmund Burke, "concepts of understanding" and "intuitions of sensibility" together comprise a realm conditioned "transcendentally, which is to say conditioned by the conditions of the mind."[60] He derives his premise from Kant, who says that the transcendental imagination is like a keystone in an arch with sensibility (the senses) at one end and understanding at the other.[61] In the politically determined, fantastic worlds of Animal Farm and 1984 the conditions of the mind are themselves conditioned by forces

outside the whale, so that understanding and sensibility (sensory representations) cannot develop to the point where they can be realized either in an active or passive way. In Animal Farm, the ruling class pigs can alter the past at will, and the so-called lower class animals put up with suffering and exploitation and unquestioningly change their beliefs in history because they are too dumb to challenge the pigs. Their Socialist revolution fails because of their ignorance and inherent passivity. In 1984, the ruling class can also alter the past, but Winston is a fighter and highly intelligent. He knows that the past is altered at will, but he is a hero because he cares about the future even though he knows the records of the future will likely be erased or unrecognizably changed later on. He wages a heroic struggle for identity and happiness against the forces of historic inevitability, determinism, and predestination. These forces are based on an underlying principle, not simply that the future will be, but that it is, since it is implicit in the structure of the past and present. Orwell challenges the Marxist concept of inevitability and his own belief in Socialism when he allows the past to be altered. The dictatorship of the proletariat will not come true if it is not possible to transcend history because the past is always in a state of flux.

In Burke's interpretation of the third section of the Communist Manifesto[62] he writes that "From the standpoint of society as a whole, an idea is 'active' insofar as it is 'adequate,' that is, insofar as it does accurately name the

benign and malign properties of that society."[63] So activism can be a naming function. Winston struggles to accurately name the malign properties of Ingsoc (English Socialism), but he doesn't go far enough to save himself from arrest by the Thought Police (in a plot reversal) and subsequent torture. His ideas are not quite "adequate." He stops reading just as Goldstein writes of Doublethink: "For it is only by reconciling contradictions that power can be retained indefinitely...If human equality is to be forever averted -- if the High, as we have called them, are to keep their places permanently - then the prevailing mental condition must be controlled insanity" (1984 217-218). By maintaining insanity, the ruling class keeps the fundamentally irrational revolutionary classes in a "passion," a passive condition of becoming and unending frustration. The revolutionary act can only become rational when it succeeds.

> The class suffering visible deprivation may transform its passion into action by a revolutionary act designed to change the nature of the State... guided and represented by a party (a class within a class) whose ideas are active insofar as they are adequate...Insofar as the changes of property relations would produce the desired betterment of society as a whole, the revolutionary effort is rational, hence active...But the revolutionary act (and its preparation) is irrational, hence a passion, to the extent of the confusions resulting from the real or imaginary dislocations of society involved in revolution[64]

Orwell's final thesis is that it is possible for man to be kept irrational, even to be made insane when he can be trapped inside the whale in a state of "passion." After Winston is brainwashed, and submerses himself in gin in a vain search for

transcendence, spinning his transcendent wheels as it were, he thinks: "'They can't get inside you,', she (Julia) had said. But they could get inside you" (1984 293). The individual has lost to society. His transcendent imagination is seemingly overwhelmed by social forces beyond his control. Jonah is forced into the whale, but Orwell cannot resist what seems to be a glimmer of hope, a final shot at nostalgia and the escapism of memory in a scene filled with pathos. While playing chess by himself in the depressing pub where he spends his days, "a memory floated into his mind," a memory of himself at the age of nine or ten and his mother, both laughing, playing Snakes and Ladders with tiddlywinks. "For a whole afternoon they had all been happy together, as in his earlier childhood. He pushed the picture out of his mind. It was a false memory" (1984 299). Winston believes his view of reality is false and doesn't even trust his own memory and understanding, probably as a protective mechanism developed during his time in the Ministry of Love. Describing his memories in the third person, he stands outside himself, a dispassionate observer.

This lyrical mood is followed by a dramatic war bulletin which gives him a kind of sick, pathetic enjoyment, alleviating his feelings of "equivocation in his heart as he wondered whether the news from the front would be of victory or defeat" (1984 300). He convinces himself that he is healed by the experience, and that new memories have replaced the old ones.

> He was back in the Ministry of Love, with everything forgiven, his soul white as snow. He was in the public dock, confessing everything, implicating everybody. He was walking down the white-tiled corridor, with the feeling of walking in sunlight, and an armed guard at his back. The long-hoped-for bullet was entering his brain...He gazed up at the enormous face. Forty years it had taken him to learn what kind of smile was hidden beneath the dark mustache. O cruel, needless misunderstanding! O stubborn, welf-willed exile from the loving breast! Two gin-scented tears trickled down the sides of his nose. But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother (1984 300).

Winston has been purged of the artificial guilt which was forced on him, and pathetically believes that he has actually abolished part of himself, in a gross parody of Orwell's unfulfilled goal first vocalized in Wigan Pier -- to abolish part of oneself in order to qualify to join the working class. Winston mourns his own death, even though he is still alive. He is one of the living dead, like Gordon Comstock who, in a confession-accusation to his friend says, "My poems are dead because I'm dead. You're dead. We're all dead. Dead people in a dead world."

In Burke's terms of temporal succession: "The action organizes the resistant factors, which call forth the passion; and the moment of transcendence arises when the sufferer (who had originally seen things in unenlightened terms) is enabled to see in more comprehensive terms, modified by his suffering."[65] The action is Big Brother breaking down Winston's resistance, encouraging frustration which is a species of passion insofar as the individual is powerless. Eventually, Winston is made passively malleable by his

suffering and susceptible to a mass-produced kind of transcendence available on the telescreen. As we have seen, on several occasions at crucial moments in his books Orwell places his characters in naturalistic situations which facilitate semi-mystical, transcendent experiences or are capable of such. He describes moments with Dorothy or Flory in the wild, or warm, sitting around the fire situations which symbolize the meditative frame of mind, and resorts to a number of submersion type images and experiences in water, under the earth or deep in poverty. As the final scene in 1984 shows, his fascination with the transcendent stays with him even though he is now politically disenchanted. Perhaps this is because transcendence is at the heart of Orwell's motivations as a writer. Transcendence is a way to connect the active and the passive, and even to be simultaneously active and passive --- a solitary state of being combined with a high level of mental activity. Orwell's coup is to link this state of mind to politics through his art. Action and passion are "localized as the peace-war pair...or may become indistinguishable, as with a pair like love and war, or the Wagnerian pair, love and death. Theories of psychogenic illness seem to be a commingling of the action-passion and mind-body pairs."[66] Winston is a living example of this commingling at its worst. He cannot distinguish action from passion and becomes a psychotic, a damaged mind in an inebriated and wounded body. He believes that peace is war and enslavement is freedom and his "art," what is left of it, reflects his beliefs.

In prior books, Orwell's characters retain some of their freedom of choice, even though they must change or abandon their goals in the end. Dorothy chooses to reject her pantheism and to continue to suffer the indignities of her daily church chores. Flory dissipates his obviously deep attachment to the world of nature in favor of drink and unrequited love. Bowling chooses to return to the security of his home after his fruitless search for the old fishing hole. Gordon the starving artist chucks his dream of becoming a great poet in favor of responsibility and fatherhood. In 1984, Winston has no choice whatsoever. His experiment with sex and Julia as a political act do not work. Finally, he doesn't even have enough free will to kill himself instead of dreaming about a bullet. It is the State that is really active, while the people suffer from its action.

Orwell's conclusion, at least as far as he got in his literary career before his death, seems to be that what happens outside the whale can be much stronger than what happens inside the whale. The state can "get inside you" and destroy your human nature. In the end, however, tears and childhood memories, driven by an inherent need to purify one's soul show the beauty of the crystal spirit of human consciousness.

Conclusion

In 1984, Orwell is unable to emulate the acceptance he had approved in Miller. Winston accepts his fate in the end alright, but it is not life affirming, it is a kind of mental narcosis and psychological suicide. With the publication of his last two books Orwell appears to come to an evolutionary endpoint of sorts. He finally gets underneath the surface of things by facing unpleasant facts. But he hardly resolves all of the questions he raises in his previous works.

The theme of reviving and remembering the past, or erasing history, takes on political significance as a way to impose activism or quietism on the masses. The existence of individual memory itself depends on social forces, and on social memory. It is ironic that when Orwell finally succeeds in making a strong link between the individual and society, he should write about how society can destroy the foundations of individuality and art. Class and cash are not only eliminated from inside the whale by those who possess moral roots, they are eliminated from the outside. One's state of mind can be made not only to reflect the political state but duplicate its empty rhetoric. He does not solve the class problem but, because he raises the issue in such a forceful manner, he opens the door for generations of readers to look for solutions.

Aesthetic or naturalistic enjoyment, self-indulgence, hedonism, sexuality and one's personal likes and dislikes become much less important when survival itself is at stake.

If anything, an opposite, active impulse toward self destruction, or abolition of part of the self to achieve a more passive state, becomes stronger. What is clear is that the human spirit, even under torture in the uttermost subterranean depths, cannot be completely stifled. Decency as an affirmation of the life force is not strong enough to withstand the utmost challenge, but Winston still does the decent thing after he has been brainwashed, he guiltily meets with Julia and tries to rekindle a spark of love. The transcendental imagination is stronger than decency. It is the keystone in the arch between sensibility and understanding and the active-passive duality, and somehow survives. The split in human consciousness between observer and observed which makes transcendence possible, and enables one to be inside and outside the whale simultaneously, remains intact. One can still observe oneself from a distance if one's life is shattered. As Dorothy Hare reflected, in the end all real events are in the mind and whether they are taking place within or outside is of secondary importance.

Finally, it is important not to judge Orwell on the basis of his last two books. The fall was not always so steep. Orwell was happy as a plongeur, as Flory and Dorothy in the fields of Burma or England, and as George Bowling the child. He came a long way from St. Cyprians, and the way was often fun.

Notes

All excerpts from the novels and principal essays critiqued will be cited parenthetically in the text using the following abbreviations:

book	abbreviation
Down and Out in Paris and London	D&O
Burmese Days	BD
A Clergyman's Daughter	ACD
The Road to Wigan Pier	WP
Keep the Aspidistra Flying	KTAF
Homage to Catalonia	HTC
Coming Up for Air	CUFA
Animal Farm	AF
1984	1984
The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell	CEJL
"Shooting an Elephant"	SAE
"A Hanging"	AH
"Inside the Whale"	ITW

(These three essays may be found in the Penguin Collected Essays of George Orwell.)

See Bibliography for editions of works cited.

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[2] George Woodcock, "Prose Like a Windowpane," The Crystal Spirit, A Study of George Orwell (Little, Brown and Co.: Boston and Toronto, 1966), p.295.

[3] "Why I Write," Penguin, p.10-11.

[4] Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1979), p.39.

[5] Burke, p.5.

[6] Burke, p.6.

[7] Raymond Williams, "Observation and Imagination in Orwell," George Orwell, A Collection of Critical Essays, (Prentice-Hall, Inc: Englewood Cliffes, N.J., 1974), p. 56.

[8] "Why I Write," Penguin, p. 9.

[9] George Orwell, Such, Such Were the Joys (Harcourt, Brace and Company: New York, 1953), p.45.

[10] Such, Such Were the Joys, p.45.

[11] Such, Such Were the Joys, p.51.

[12] Such, Such Were the Joys, p.52.

[13] Karl Fredrick, "George Orwell: The White Man's Burden," A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, Vol. 8 (Thames and Hudson: London, 1963), p.149.

[14] Down and Out in Paris and London, p.15.

[15] Williams, p.56.

[16] Frederick, p.161.

[17] John Atkins, George Orwell (Calder & Boyars: London, 1971), p.119.

[18] Both are in the Penguin collection.

[19] Sant Singh Bal, George Orwell, The Ethical Imagination (Humanities Press Inc.: Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1981), p.196.

[20] Irving Howe, Decline of the New (Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.: New York, 1970), p.272.

[21] David Lawrence Kubal, Outside the Whale: George Orwell's Art and Politics (University of Notre Dame Press, London, 1972), p.77.

[22] Philip Rieff, "George Orwell and the Post-Liberal Imagination" and "Orwell's Apolcalypse: Coming Up for Air," Modern Critical Views, ed. Harold Bloom (Chelsea House Publishers: New York, New Haven, Philadelphia, 1987), p.54.

[23] Rieff, p.53.

[24] Christopher Small, The Road to Miniluv: George Orwell, the State, and God (University of Pittsburgh Press: printed in Great Britain, 1976), p.57.

[25] Small, p.56.

[26] Roberta Kalechofsky, "Studies in Popular Culture: Essays and Coming Up for Air," George Orwell (Frederick Ungar Publishing Co.: New York, 1973), p.80.

[27] Richard Smyer, "Questioning the Past" and "Politics and the Imagination," Primal Dream and Primal Crime: Orwell's Development as a Psychological Novelist (University of Missouri Press: Columbia and London, 1979), p.122.

[28] Kubal, p.102.

[29] Kubal, p.102.

[30] Kubal, p.103.

[31] Kubal, p.103.

[32] Williams, p.59.

[33] Williams, p.60.

[34] Williams, p.57.

[35] Kubal, p.108.

[36] Kubal, p.112.

[37] Williams, p.56,58.

[38] Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, 1780-1950 (Harper & Row, Publishers: New York, 1968), p.289.

[39] Woodcock, p.109.

[40] Williams, Culture and Society, p.291.

[41] Williams, Culture and Society, p.292.

[42] "Why I Write," Penguin, p.12.

[43] Penguin, p.11.

[44] Penguin, p.10.

[45] Smyer, p.77.

[46] Smyer, p.78.

[47] Williams, George Orwell, p.58.

[48] "Why I Write," Penguin, p.9.

[49] "Why I Write," Penguin, p.12.

[50] Dudley Young, "Still Life Inside the Whale," PN Review, Vol. 18 (1980): p.39.

[51] "Inside the Whale," Penguin, p. 132. Hereafter referred to as ITW.

[52] Rieff, p.57-58.

[53] Keith Alldritt, The Making of George Orwell: An Essay in Literary History (Edward Arnold: London, 1979), p.128.

[54] Smyer, p.90.

[55] Alldritt, p.134.

[56] Alldritt, p.130.

[57] John Rodden, The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of St. George Orwell (Oxford University Press: London, 1989), p.182.

[58] Alldritt, p.135

[59] Rieff, p.61.

[60] Burke, p.191-192.

[61] Burke, p.198.

[62] Burke, p.211-212.

[63] Burke, p.211.

[64] Burke, p.211-212.

[65] Burke, p.264.

[66] Burke, p.419-420.

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